11: Cipriani E-3 (1951-1955) 1966 AZ2 Andamans AZ2

most striking of these is ambidexterity. This is the general rule in the Onges and also appears as a normal trait in the primitive peoples of Oceania, America and Asia. Another physical characteristic of the Onges, reported also in Tasmans and various peoples of Oceania, is the early onset of ageing in both sexes; in the Tasmans the women are rarely fertile after the age of thirty, and this is also probably the case with the Onges. Unlike the Tasmans, however, the Onges, though sharing their very black skin colour, have among other physical differences markedly scant body hair. A study of their blood groups by Dr H. Lehmann (see also Mourant) has moreover lent very considerable support to the external physical evidence in favour of a relationship between the Andamanese and the people of Oceania, both past and present.

From the anthropological point of view perhaps the most outstanding feature of all these peoples is that despite their extreme aggressiveness towards outsiders their corporate sense is such that they have no need of leaders to give orders. Rarely are there hereditary leaders; such as they are, their leaders are chosen on the basis of outstanding powers, such as supposed clairvoyance, as in the Andamanese.

The Andamanese themselves know nothing of their origins, lost in the mists of time, and it is for us to trace them, working back along the paths cleared by the anthropologist, the ethnographer and the archaeologist. They represent today the survival, almost unchanged, of a culture once to be found all over Oceania, spread thousands of years ago by canoes hardly different from those the Onges use today. They carried the unknown seamen from island to island, bearing with them a way of life which in the Andamans at least was never to change – a point of arrival, rather than of departure. Driven in on themselves by circumstances of geography just as other circumstances now unknown had driven them there originally, they have remained isolated, dwindling in numbers over the centuries, until they were discovered by the modern world. Their reception of outsiders, however they come and whoever they may be, is aggressive; consciously or unconsciously the Andamanese seek to preserve the only way of life they know. And who can be sure they are wrong?

No one could deny the demographic decadence of the islanders,